

USEPA - REGION CONTACTS

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USEPA, REGION 1

Ngozi Oleru, PhD
One Congress Street, 11th Floor
Boston, MA 02203-0001
617/918-1120 FAX: 617/918-1029
(Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New
Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont)

USEPA, REGION 2

Melva Hayden;
290 Broadway, 26th Floor
New York, NY 10007
212/637-5027 FAX: 212/637-4943
(New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico,
Virgin Islands)

USEPA, REGION 3

Reginald Harris,
1650 Arch St.
Philadelphia, PA 19107
215/814-2988 FAX: 215/814-2905
(Delaware, District of Columbia,
Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West
Virginia)

USEPA, REGION 4

Connie Raines;
61 Forsyth Stree
Atlanta, GA 30303
404/562-9671 FAX: 404/562-9664
(Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky,
Mississippi, North Carolina, South
Carolina, Tennessee)

USEPA, REGION 5

Karla Johnson;
77 West Jackson Blvd. T-16J
Chicago, IL 60604-3507
312/886-5993 FAX: 312/886-2737
(Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota,
Ohio, Wisconsin)

USEPA, REGION 6

Olivia R. Balandran
First Interstate Bank, at Front Pl.
1445 Ross Ave.
Dallas, TX 75202-2733
214/665-7257 FAX: 214/665-6648
(Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico,
Oklahoma, Texas)

USEPA, REGION 7

Althea Moses;
726 Minnesota Avenue
Kansas City, KS 66101
913/551-7649 FAX: 913/551-7941
(Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska)

USEPA, REGION 8

Elisabeth Evans;
999 18th Street, Suite 500
Denver, CO 80202-2405
303/312-6053 FAX: 303/312-6409
(Colorado, Montana, North Dakota,
South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming)

USEPA, REGION 9

Karen Henry
Ronnell Pascual
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105
415/744-1581 FAX: 415/538-5062
415/744-1212
(Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada,
American Samoa, Guam)

USEPA, REGION 10

Joyce Crosson-Kelly;
Planning and Evaluation Branch
1200 Sixth Avenue (MD-142)
Seattle, WA 98101
206/553-4029 FAX: 206/553-1743
(Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington)

United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

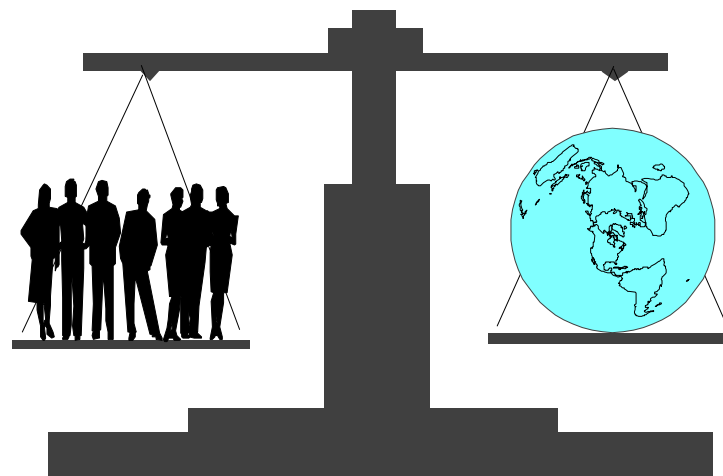
Enforcement
and Compliance
Assurance (2201A)

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Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ)



SERVING A DIVERSE SOCIETY



What is Environmental Justice?

Environmental Justice means that all people have an opportunity to live in a healthy environment. All people are entitled to breathe clean air, drink clean water and consume uncontaminated foods.

Unfortunately, today this is still a goal. Historically, low-income and culturally diverse communities have been disproportionately impacted by environmental pollutants. Awareness and concern about inequities in the distribution of environmental hazards is increasing. Since 1994 With the signing in February 1994 of Presidential Order No. 12898 "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations," there has been heightened interest in these issues. You will find significant information available on actions taken by the federal government and especially by EPA. You can visit the Web Site <http://www.epa.gov> and find out what has been happening.

Some examples of environmental problems which occur primarily in low-income and culturally diverse communities include the following:

Lead. Almost two-thirds of American housing units were built before 1970. Although the use of lead paint for houses was banned in the 1970's, older homes often contain paint with high concentrations of lead. Additional sources of lead in the home are: drinking water extracting lead from lead pipes and fixtures, lead in dust (usually from paint), and contaminated soils carried in from outside. The primary pathway for exposure is from ingestion of paint chips and dust containing lead. There is a particularly high concentration of lead problems in low-income and culturally diverse populations, who live in the inner city where the public housing units were built before 1970.

Waste Sites. Low income, and quite often culturally diverse populations, are more likely than other groups to live near landfills, incinerators, and hazardous waste treatment facilities.

Call the Office of Environmental Justice

1-800-962-6215 (Outside of DC-MD-VA)
202-564-2515 (Local to DC-MD-VA)

OR:

Visit our web site at

<http://www.epa.gov>

OR:

Stop by our office at the

Federal Triangle Metro Stop.
1200 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Room 2224 Ariel Rios Building
(Between Penn. & Constitution On 12th)
Washington, D.C. 20004

OR:

Write us at

Office of Environmental Justice
401 M Street SW (MC-2201-A)
Washington, DC 20460

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- # **Understand cultural diversity.** Many cultural groups depend upon fishing to augment their diet either because of poverty or tradition. Of the 250 million Americans, 49 million (20 percent) are African American, American Indian, or Asian American; 22 million (9 percent) are Hispanic American.
- # **Poverty severely limits options and opportunities.** Low income groups cannot always move away from undesirable places, do not have adequate health care and may suffer more exposure to environmental hazards.

Would You Like More Information?

Then review the next page containing information on how to reach the Office of Environmental Justice and also you can find out who your local contact is by reviewing the EJ Coordinators listed on Page 8.

Air Pollution. In 1990, 437 of the 3,109 counties and independent cities in the U.S. failed to meet at least one of EPA's ambient air

quality standards. Many Americans live in these communities: 57 percent of all whites, 65 percent of African Americans, and 80 percent of Hispanics.

Pesticides. Approximately 90 percent of the 2 million hired farm workers in the United States are people of color, including Chicano, Puerto Ricans, Caribbean blacks and African Americans. Through direct exposure to pesticides, farm workers and their families may face serious health risks. It has been estimated that as many as 313,000 farm workers in the U.S. may suffer from pesticide-related illnesses each year.

Wastewater:

City Sewers. Modern sewage systems were developed to carry sewage and storm water separately to prevent overflow problems that are common in older, urban areas. Many inner cities still have sewer systems that are not designed to handle storm overflow. As a result, raw sewage may be carried into local rivers and streams during storms, creating a health hazard.

Agricultural Runoff. More recently, streams and rivers in rural areas with concentrations of commercial truck farms and animal feedlots have suffered mysterious lesions in fish and algae blooms resulting in fish kills. High levels of phosphorus support algae growth, which blocks reaeration, reducing the level of oxygen needed to support aquatic life. It is suspected that the increased use of commercial fertilizers and concentrations of animal wastes contribute to the degradation of receiving streams and rivers in rural areas, with communities that are often low income and culturally diverse.

How Can You Work With Communities?

EPA's Regional Coordinators (See Last Page) have suggested a number of communication techniques for working with low income and culturally diverse communities.

- # Take the community seriously. If you hear from a community resident that there is a problem, listen and see if you can help.
- # Listen to what is said.
- # Make use of facilitators when groups bring a problem to a local meeting.
- # Identify and work with informal networks.
- # Get out early and talk with your community members
- # Work with the media cognizant of the specific community in which you are seeking information
- # Recognize that culturally diverse citizens are frequently not members of national environmental organizations and may need to be contacted through other more local means
- # Hold workshops with local community leaders
- # Build bridges for long term planning changes
- # Be sensitive to working with culturally diverse groups. Each culture sees the issue differently.

Involve the academic institutions near the community, especially the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and institutions

belonging to the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU).

What Is Your Role?

- # Learn about the community in which you are working. How familiar are you with its population? For example, are there people who don't speak English well, people who can't read, or people who are shut in? Will work schedules keep people from attending community meetings?
- # Did you know that 32 million (14 percent) of the people in the U.S. speak a language other than English at home? For example in California, 0.6 million people speak Chinese and 5.5 million speak Spanish at home. Over 17 million (8 percent) of the people living in the U.S. speak Spanish at home.
- # Are announcements and information of special interest to non-English speakers, such as fish advisories and Superfund site fact sheets, available in the native language needed to reach the most impacted people? What is the requirement to reach the most impacted people? How diverse is the community?
- # Consider Age. Inter-generational equity means that younger or older generations should not bear a greater environmental burden. Children are especially vulnerable to harm from toxic substances and may be exposed through normal play. Is there a relatively high population of children in the community? Do children play outdoors where they may come in contact with contaminated soil and water?